



Module 7: Shadow Work and Therapeutic Discomfort in Cacao Work

Defining Shadow Work

- Looking at, owning, or re-experiencing parts of ourselves or our past experiences that we have repressed (forgot about without realizing it) or actively tried to hide from ourselves and/or others
- Bring intentional awareness in order to release the energy being held there, so that it can be put to better use
- 95% of cacao ceremonies are “light work” experiences: more bhakti, songs, peace, love, joy. More on the surface of things.
 - There’s nothing wrong with light work, but it’s very rare for facilitators to be equipped for shadow work
 - Without willingness to look at the shadow, it can come out unintentionally or in unhelpful ways

Defining Therapeutic Discomfort

- Nervousness, fear, tension, or similar feelings that can arise in embodied or interactive healing or self-development practices
- Commonly understood in yoga practice (when things are a little uncomfortable to release deep tension), but it can have literal or metaphorical meaning in other contexts
 - It can be physical, emotional, or psychological
- DISCOMFORT is okay and sometimes helpful. PAIN is not. These are not explicitly distinguished enough, except by skilled yoga teachers.
- Discomfort does not guarantee or equate to healing, evolution, or enlightenment
 - At the same time, some intense practices like pulsation breathwork can be very uncomfortable at moments and also powerfully healing
- Look out for “intensity junkies” who become addicted to long-term, severe strain or discomfort, thinking that’s the only way to heal or make progress
 - “Addiction” in this context means being hooked on something that causes more harm than good, even if it’s a prolonged sense of being incomplete

Be Able to Explain Your “Why”

- Non-verbal Embodiment Practices:
 - Various types of active meditation, breathwork, energetic movement, dancing, etc.
- Verbal Inter-Action Practices:
 - Communication, connection, verbal intimacy, role play, T-Group, etc.
- Explain why we’re leading something, while leaving enough spaciousness for people to have their own experience.
 - Bringing in our “why” can strengthen the container and help people relax into the experience
 - It creates safety if they know there’s a reason for the activity and not just some random instruction
 - It means being authentic about our beliefs and owning them as subjective (remember: T-Group)
 - Introduce things as “an invitation,” say what something “can” or “may” offer instead of what they “need to” get out of it

The Meaning of Different Arrangements and Positions

- Yoga class: There’s a hierarchy with teacher at the front, and structure where people are looking in the same direction
 - No connection between students. They’re in their own experience but focused on the teacher.
- U-shape: Focus on one person, creating a more participatory power dynamic
 - Can be used for empowerment experiences, speaking in front of a group, receiving feedback, etc. It can dissolve our self-criticisms.
 - As facilitators, be aware of the power dynamic we have in front of the group, as we talked about on the subject of congruence
- Circle: Equal playing field. Everyone sees everyone. Inclusive energy. Facilitator is on the same level as participants, in a way.

- Opening and closing of a ceremony
- Present Moment Noting practice
- Gallery view on Zoom
- Everyone spread out: No hierarchy. No collected focus. Everyone has a slightly different experience.
 - People can hide in the crowd (safety in numbers; school of fish), which can allow them to relax even more into the experience
 - Example: Roving Puja
- Value of different exercise arrangements, numbers and shapes
 - Whole circle: The most exposing, which is good for intention/integration circles, and certain empowerment exercises (speaking in front of the group)
 - Small groups (most commonly 3-4): Private but not as intimidating as pairs
 - Great for people talking about personal things that they don't usually talk about
 - In pairs: The most intimate and private. Can feel really vulnerable for some.
 - Great for eye gazing, mirroring activities, white tantra (seeing the other as part of ourselves, being at peace with all parts of ourselves)
- Body positions as symbolic/bioenergetic metaphors
 - This is an esoteric idea that someone can put their body into a different position to access different states relating to developmental psychology
 - Nick learned about it from transformational facilitator Gaia Ma
 - Relevant in advanced practices like role play, but also in how you navigate a workshop in general
 - Main positions:
 - Standing: symbolic of adult (or divinity)
 - Sitting: symbolic of child
 - Lying down: symbolic of infant (or corpse)

- This one could send people into trauma imprint
- Also, if we're walking around, be mindful of our facial gestures, posture, etc., since that could create new negative imprints

Defining Trauma and Trauma Healing

- As of 2020, the field of trauma work is still emergent. It's not a fixed body of knowledge.
 - Somatic Experiencing, the work of Peter Levine, Ph.D.
 - *The Body Keeps the Score*, book by Bessel van der Kolk, M.D.
 - Trauma Release Exercises (TRE) by David Berceli, Ph.D.
- Trauma is anything the nervous system registers as life-threatening, even if it wasn't actually
- The same events can have a different effect on different people. It's subject to personal interpretation, background, etc.
- The effects tend to be less severe if a person was able to take action to help themselves
 - Story of kids stuck in a cave. Those who took action had less long-term trauma.
- Defining trauma healing:
 - Few practices are framed as trauma release practices. But as we've talked about, shaking and quivering appears in other modalities.
 - De-arm the nervous system and release energetic gunk stored up by those painful or scary experiences
 - Bring resolution to the painful stories on the level of communication, beliefs, and identity
 - Give people more skills and sovereignty around touch, boundaries, and psychological self-defense
 - At the very least, creating a really safe container, serving people cacao, and not screwing them up more can be a trauma release experience (i.e. a "healing" experience)

Deep Considerations for Consent and Safety

- We were mostly raised without the ability to make big decisions about our lives
- So allowing people to choose and approve what and how they participate in ceremonies will be healing in itself
- Remind them that everything is an invitation and they can adjust or take a break if needed
 - Many people would feel guilty or ashamed to do that
- Get consent around touch!
 - This is a problem in many yoga studios, where teachers don't get clear consent from students about physical adjustments
 - If it's a non-verbal activity, get consent in advance. For example, a supportive touch during breathwork or trauma release work.
 - Blind vote: Introduce the practice, then have them close their eyes. Say: "Raise your hand if you'd prefer I not offer adjustments during this practice."
- Consent not just between teacher and student with touch, but also with beliefs, and also between participants!
 - Don't assume that everyone has strong, healthy boundaries
- Thoughts on sexual or romantic connections between teachers and students

Don't Call People Out in Class or Ceremony

- Feel free to praise people by name if it's relevant and balanced
 - If you do, spread it around. Not favoring participants, like "teacher's pets"
- If it's constructive criticism:
 - If it's a safety thing, go up to them immediately
 - If it's more minor, you could wait til after class and ask if they're open to feedback
 - Or de-personalize it (e.g., "Everyone please remember to keep quiet during this part.")

- An advanced class might be different, or if you know someone is open to raw feedback on the spot (since firmer facilitation might be what some people need)
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EMBODIMENT TOOLKIT – Quivering for Trauma Release

- A safe and easy experience of quivering in the large muscles of the legs to mimic how other mammals involuntarily quiver after a near-death experience
- If the quivering can happen and take its course, they heal much better
- For us the mental aspect is so involved and we don't shake automatically, so it stores up as muscle memory and can lead to chronic illness (including "mental illness")
- It's not necessary for people to recall the actual story of trauma... but in a cacao ceremony that might have already come to mind as part of their intention or other exercises, and TRE could promote healing on that

*SAFETY NOTE: It can be very vulnerable for people to lay down with their legs open, especially if they have any trauma connected with their lower body. Remind people that everyone's eyes are closed and that it's all an invitation.

- **DIRECTIONS:** Lie down on your back and bring the knees up with the heels about 12 inches from the pelvis
- Close the eyes and allow the arms to rest at your sides
- Bring the soles of the feet to touch (as much as possible) and let the knees rest out to the sides
- After about 30 seconds, slowly (inch by inch) bring the knees up closer together until the muscles of the inner thighs start to quiver, and **STAY THERE**
- Allow the quiver to expand as much as possible, maybe even up through the pelvis and the torso. Keep breathing.
- If you lose the quiver, change the distance between the knees and find it again. If you still can't find it, move the feet a little further from or closer to the pelvis.
- All the quivering to continue for at least 10 minutes (up to 20 minutes, but it's not a hard limit), allowing any yawns, sighs, or tears that want to come
- When you're ready for the quivering to end, bring the legs straight out in front of you on the ground. Keep eyes closed and breath normally for a few minutes.

- Then gradually bring people back to sitting. This is a great time for a reflection circle.
- It's not necessary for people to recall the actual story of trauma... but in a cacao ceremony that might have already come to mind as part of their intention or other exercises, and TRE could promote healing on that specific thing.

Module 7 / Exercise 1: *Go at least 4 days this week without consuming cacao.* Notice if you have trouble with this, and if you've been using cacao habitually or without mindfulness.

On one of the days without cacao, create a ritual for yourself where you experience cacao in other ways. Spend time smelling the paste deeply with eyes closed. Put a small piece of paste in your mouth, let it melt and sit there, but then spit it out. Melt some paste on the stove (with coconut oil or a double boiler; don't let it get too hot!) and rub it on your face or other part of your skin, feeling deeply into the sensation of it. Make a small cup and just feel the energy and the effect of the aroma. Pour this cup on the earth, imagining it as a blessing to whatever you understand to be "the divine." Share something about your experience in the webform.

Module 7 / Exercise 2: Journal about your experiences with physical consent in workshops, yoga classes, or similar settings. Note what the teacher did or did not do to ensure holding a safe space. Now spend some time writing about your own values in a self-responsible way. Think T-Group language... "I statements," feelings, stories. Also desires for what kind of container you want to hold, how you'll welcome feedback, or other ways to create safety. Share that in the webform.

NOTES